

PARROTS AND MONKEYS

Parrots and monkeys, while having no direct relation to each other, seem somehow to be associated in the popular mind. Perhaps this is due to the fact that of all the animals native to tropical jungles, these two have taken strongest hold on the popular imagination. It is interesting to get to know a little of them in their native habitat.

Monkeys in the wild state are now rare in Pernambuco, though a few may be found in the largest forests. The only kind that is fairly common is the little marmoset called by the Brazilians saguim. It is about the size of a grey squirrel, and looks quite a bit like a squirrel at a casual glance, as the tail is rather furry. It stands very low in the scale of monkeys, having claws instead of nails on all the toes except the great toe of each foot. On one of my trips through the interior we stopped at a spring on a mountain side, and could hear the saguins chattering in the branches above us, but try as we would we could not see them. The Brazilians in the party recognized the sound; I should not have been certain what it was. That was the nearest I ever came to seeing them in the woods. But these marmosets are quite common in some of the cities, living in the trees unmolested, as squirrels do in North American cities. Often they are tame enough that they may be called, and will come down and take a piece of fruit from the hand, and go scampering up the tree to eat it.

The real monkey country of Brazil is the Amazon valley, far away to the northwest of Pernambuco. But on the one trip that I made up the Amazon to Manaus I failed to see a single monkey in the trees along the river banks, though I looked assiduously, with a powerful field glass. I suppose they are rather shy along the main routes of travel. In 1936, in the month of November, I was on a freighter coming from Brazil. We called at Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon, and a man came aboard who was taking a shipment of monkeys and tropical fish to New York. He had twenty-odd monkeys, and about twenty tanks of tropical fish, of a great many varieties. The monkey cages and fish tanks were arranged on the deck, forward, in a position that afforded as much shelter from the wind as possible. A pump was installed to aerate the water in the fish tanks, and the man was kept extremely busy the whole trip, preparing the food for the monkeys,

cleaning their cages, and tending the fish. I was afraid that we should run into some cold weather in New York, but fortunately it was not very cold when we arrived there December 2, and his cargo got there intact. One or two of the monkeys died on the way, but the man said he always expected to lose a few.

Anyone who may have occasion to be in Belem should not fail to visit the zoo there. It has only animals of the Amazon region, but a very good collection of those. The monkeys are exceptionally fine, and of all I have seen they appear the healthiest and most content, living in spacious open air cages, under conditions closely approximating their natural habitat. There is an excellent collection of parrots, too.

Parrots in the wild state are not nearly so rare as monkeys, but these, too, have been pushed back by advancing civilization, so that they are seldom seen in the vicinity of the larger towns. Back in the sertão, however, they are plentiful, and are considered a pest to be destroyed if possible. In the neighborhood of the Paulo Afonso Falls I saw numerous flocks of them flying near the road. They have a characteristic wing motion that renders them easily identified in flight, even when seen at too great a distance to distinguish form and color.

I came to know five different varieties of parrots, classified according to size and general appearance, but there are probably many other variations. These five, according to size, beginning with the smallest, are: periquito, (which is the Portuguese form of our word "parakeet") jandaia, maracanã, papagaio, and arara. The periquito is about the size of a robin, but somewhat plumper. They are very common in the part of Pernambuco where we lived, and appeared in flocks of forty or fifty, covering the ground or the branches of a tree, and chattering incessantly. I could never notice that they did any harm to gardens or anything else, and we never disturbed them. They are green, but not so vividly green as some of the larger parrots; but in flight they show a patch of vivid blue which is quite striking. People tell me that no trap has been devised that will catch them, but that they may sometimes be caught with birdlime.

The jandaia is larger than the periquito, and has a long tail. I have never heard of a periquito that learned to talk, but I have heard stories of jandaias that became very good talkers. Some of my schoolboys told me a story about jandaias, for which I

make no guarantee of accuracy, but I think it is worth passing on. It seems that the jandaias flock together in large numbers, and in the season of green corn a flock of them will descend on a corn field and do great damage, the hooked beak being admirably adapted for tearing the husk and eating the green corn. The farmers naturally resent this destruction of their crops, and often shoot the birds and chase them away. The story is that the jandaias appoint one of their number as sentinel, to warn the others of the approach of danger. In the event that the sentinel fail to warn the group of the danger, through carelessness, or preoccupation with feeding, and one or more of the group are killed, the others attack and kill the negligent sentinel. Certain it is that they take fright easily, and it is difficult to get a shot at them.

Still more destructive than the jandaia is the larger maracanã, which is nearly or quite as large as the regular talking parrot. In fact, some of them looked larger to me, but I never tried to make strict comparison. I never heard of a maracanã being tamed, or taught to talk, though perhaps they are, sometimes. But there seems to be something fundamentally wild about them. Like our crows in North America, they have continued to exist and propagate their kind, in spite of all the efforts made by the farmers to destroy them. Walking along quietly between the corn rows, one may now and then get a shot at a maracanã. I brought down a few of them in this way, but they generally fly before the hunter gets within range. The meat of them is dark, and inclined to be tough, but when well cooked is quite tasty. Brazilian hunters say jokingly that when one shoots at a parrot and misses, the parrot looks back, thrusts out his tongue, and gives vent to some contemptuous or obscene expression; but one must always make allowance for the stories of hunters.

Returning from a hunt one day I was standing talking to some men when a parrot flew into a tree near us, and set up such a chattering as I have seldom heard. The men suggested that I shoot it, and I walked quietly to within range of the tree, but was unable to see the parrot. I could see a commotion among the leaves in the place from which the chattering seemed to come, and I fired into that spot. To my surprise, out fell two parrots, a pair I suppose, but possibly two fighting males. The coloring was approximately the same. They were different from the other maracanãs that I had

seen, being larger and more brilliantly colored, a rich green, with splashes of red and yellow. The men told me this was the maracanã de olho branco (white eyed maracanã). They did indeed have a spot of white around the eye. So beautiful were they that I felt like a criminal to have killed them.

The common talking parrot is called a papagaio. Incidentally, a boy's kite is also called a papagaio. This name is supposed to be derived from the Arabic, whereas most of the parrot names come from the Tupí. They are seldom seen in the wild state in the settled part of Pernambuco, but as pets they are extremely common. They become very tame, and are seldom kept in cages, but wander freely about the house and yard, generally having one certain perch where they are fed, and where they oftenest sit. Often when the family is at table the parrot will come walking in, with the queer, shuffling walk they have, and perhaps climb up the clothing of one or another member of the family, to sit on his shoulder, or walk about on the table and be given occasional bites of food. Sometimes they fly, but not often. I remember a little girl coming to me to ask permission to get a parrot that had flown into one of the trees on the school grounds. But mostly they seem to forget that they have ever flown. The parrot is essentially a climber, though in the wild state they fly very well. I remember a Brazilian telling me that parrots, as they grow old, are inclined to begin biting at their toes, and in the course of years bite them off joint by joint until finally their whole feet are eaten away. I don't know whether that is a custom of parrots generally, or whether it is only Brazilian parrots that carry "nail biting" to such an extreme.

Largest of all the parrots are the araras, and magnificent birds they are, colored in most brilliant patterns of red, blue, green and yellow, some of them almost three feet in length. One has to go pretty far back now to find araras wild, but they are quite common in captivity, often uncaged. The powerful beak looks as if it could take off a finger, and probably could. They are treated with respect, but are generally inoffensive.

The jandaia can usually say at least his own name, and the arara almost always says that, if nothing more. It may be that these names were given them because that

was the sound most commonly uttered. But the bird seems to think it is talking. On approaching an arara, the visitor generally addresses it as "Arara", and the bird, if in a loquacious mood, answers, "Arara". But the papagaio is not addressed as "Pagagaio", but as "Meu louro". A louro is a person with yellow or golden hair, and perhaps the fact that the parrot usually has some yellow on it has given rise to this name. (The word meu, of course, is "my") Whatever the origin, that is what it is called, and those the words generally spoken, as one says "pretty Polly" to a parrot in this country. And of course the answer generally received is "Meu louro".

That some parrots learn to talk extensively and to sing is a commonplace; but a friend of mine in Brazil told me a story of a parrot that had learned to sing a little chorus that the children are often taught to sing in Sunday School, which begins:

Eu creio, sim, ó creio, sim, (I believe, oh I believe

Jesús morreu por mim. That Jesus died for me.)

The parrot would sing this song perfectly up to the last two words, which it would on no condition say. And the owners, with that half superstitious respect with which parrots are generally regarded in Brazil, were convinced that the parrot understood perfectly the words of the song, but that, knowing that Jesus died for people but not for birds, he refused to sing anything that was not theologically correct!